

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **REP. BOB KUZMAN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT**

INDIANAPOLIS – We have entered the last week of the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly, with final agreements yet to be made on this year's key issues.

There is no easy way to describe the atmosphere at the Statehouse during this time in the session. Because of the complications of the conference committee process, meetings on matters like the state budget or daylight-saving time can take place with only a couple of hours' notice. Subjects thought to be dead and buried for this year can rise back to life with stunning speed.

More than 100 bills have been sent to conference committees, the groups designed to settle differences between the House and Senate versions of a particular measure. Legislative leaders keep telling us that our work will be completed by Friday (April 29), so the next several days will be busy in order to meet that deadline.

While there are many people who will be wanting to see what happens on such things as a new stadium for the Indianapolis Colts or education reforms, I think it is safe to say that most of the attention in these last few days will focus on two issues: the biennial state budget and daylight-saving time.

I remain concerned that the budget proposals now before the Legislature will not do enough to assist public schools throughout Indiana, and will add to the burdens facing property taxpayers in our state.

The budget plans endorsed by the House and Senate Republicans provide only minor increases in state support that will benefit a very few school corporations. Both budgets fail to provide a minimum funding guarantee and fail to fully fund textbook reimbursements and local school transportation costs.

If either plan is allowed to become law, these requirements will force school officials to make a choice between firing teachers, cutting academic and extracurricular programs, or raising property taxes. Some may be forced to do all of the above. Early indications are that as many as 6,000 teachers statewide will lose their jobs because of funding cuts.

Both budget proposals also place a cap on the Property Tax Replacement Credits that were used by the state to reduce the property tax bills for homeowners. It is very easy to see that these added costs will be passed along to local residents in the form of property tax increases, with some estimates of these increases running as high as \$640 million. This is a reversal from recent sessions, when lawmakers on both sides of the aisle worked to reduce local property taxes.

The Republican budgets also do not provide adequate funding for Medicaid, the federal program that provides health care for children, the elderly and disabled. If costs of this program exceed what has been budgeted, the state will be forced to come up with the funding needed to make up the shortfall. That means critical funds will be taken away from other vital state programs.

I cannot support either budget plan created by the House and Senate Republicans. Because they ignore obligations to education and health care, I do not believe they are balanced. Because they add to the burden of local property taxpayers, I do not think they are honest. Much work needs to be done to improve these budgets before I will agree to vote for them.

Plans to bring daylight-saving time to most of Indiana also remain up in the air as I write this. Gov. Daniels is insisting that we pass legislation making the time change, but he has not offered a clear answer to those people who believe

Indiana should be in the Central Time Zone rather than on Eastern Time.

There is an effort under way to require the state to ask the U.S. Department of Transportation to conduct public hearings throughout Indiana in the next several months to gauge public opinion on the proper time zone and allowing some areas close to the Illinois border to change from Eastern to Central Time. How these issues are handled will probably determine whether the proposal becomes law this session.

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